



Tuberculosis (TB) Q & A

WHAT IS TB?

TB is caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. When a person with infectious TB sings, talks, sneezes, coughs or shares smoking devices, TB bacteria are released into the air. These very tiny particles can travel on air currents and can be inhaled by other people in the immediate area.

WHAT IS LATENT TB INFECTION (LTBI)?

LTBI occurs when a person has been exposed to TB bacteria, but do not have symptoms of the disease. They do not feel sick and they are not able to spread TB to others. The only sign of TB is a positive skin test and/or blood test. People with latent TB infection are not contagious. People with LTBI can go on to develop TB disease, so it is important they are seen by a healthcare provider and follow their instructions.

HOW DO YOU TEST FOR LTBI?

The Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) is the most common test for TB exposure. This is a skin test given and read by a qualified healthcare provider. This test is done following contact with a TB case, before beginning a job in a health-related field and before some medical treatments. There are times when a TST may react even though the person has not been exposed to TB. In that case, a blood test, called an Interferon Gamma Release Assay (IGRA), may also be requested. Your healthcare provider will let you know what follow-up is needed after receiving the results of a TST.

HOW IS LTBI TREATED?

If it is determined that you have LTBI, you may require treatment with an antibiotic. It is usually one antibiotic taken for nine months.

WHAT IS ACTIVE TB DISEASE?

Active TB disease develops when the body cannot contain the TB germs and symptoms of the disease develop. These symptoms include a productive cough, chest pain, night sweats, unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite, fatigue, fever and/or coughing up blood. Symptoms of TB in other areas of the body depend on the areas affected (e.g.

swollen lymph nodes or joint pain). People with TB disease are often infectious and can spread TB to others. They need to be treated. Untreated TB disease can cause death.

HOW DO YOU TEST FOR ACTIVE TB?

If you have a positive TST, or TB is suspected, a physician/nurse practitioner will do further tests for TB, such as an examination of the sputum and a chest x-ray.

HOW IS ACTIVE TB TREATED?

Active disease is treated with a combination of drugs for the first two months usually followed by two drugs as determined by your physician

CAN TB BE CURED?

Yes. TB can be cured but the treatment is for at least six months. It is extremely important that you follow the prescribed treatment plan and finish the medication exactly as instructed or you may get even sicker.

DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR THE MEDICATION?

No. The medications are provided, free of charge by the Department of Health and Community Services.

HOW EASY IS IT TO CONTRACT TB?

There are several factors involving the patient, the TB bacteria and the environment that determine whether transmission may occur. The probability of transmission increases with the following:

1. Bacterial burden (number of bacteria seen in a sputum smear), upper lung zone disease especially if a cavity is found on x-ray, and laryngeal disease.
2. Amount and severity of cough in the source case.
3. Duration of exposure.
4. Proximity to the source case.
5. Crowding and poor room ventilation.
6. Delays in getting a diagnosis and/or starting effective treatment.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on TB go to website <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tbpc-latb/faq-eng.php> and for the Newfoundland and Labrador TB guideline go to http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/tuberculosis_management.pdf